DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 107 CS 510 164

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TITLE Improving Listening Skills in Children.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 60p.; Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and IRI/Skylight.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Elementary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; *Listening Comprehension; *Listening Skills; Reading Comprehension
IDENTIFIERS Direct Instruction

ABSTRACT

This report describes strategies utilized to improve listening skills. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in grades one, two and three in two neighboring Midwestern states. Poor listening skills were documented by parent and student surveys, teacher observation and observation checklists. Review of the literature indicated that lack of instruction in the area of listening, the effects of television, poor listening habits and external distractions contributed to students' poor listening skills. Solution strategies, as reviewed in the literature, resulted in three categories of interventions: direct instruction in listening provided by the teacher, modeling, practice and home suggestions. Post intervention data indicated an improvement in student use of listening strategies. With the improvement of listening strategies came increased understanding and comprehension of the subject matter. (Contains 15 references, 7 notes, a table of data, and 2 figures of data; appendixes contain survey instruments, checklists, graphic organizers, listening behaviors, and directions for a listening game.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This report described strategies utilized to improve listening skills. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in grades one, two and three in two neighboring midwestern states. Poor listening skills were documented by parent and student surveys, teacher observation and observation checklists.

Review of the literature indicated that lack of instruction in the area of listening, the effects of television, poor listening habits and external distractions contributed to students' poor listening skills.

Solution strategies, as reviewed in the literature, resulted in three categories of interventions: direct instruction in listening provided by the teacher, modeling, practice and home suggestions.

Post intervention data indicated an improvement in student use of listening strategies. With the improvement of listening strategies came increased understanding and comprehension of the subject matter.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted elementary classes exhibit inadequate listening skills, which contribute to lower student achievement. Evidence of this problem includes poor comprehension and retention of concepts taught, as measured through observation checklists, surveys and teacher observation.

Immediate Problem Context

School A is centered in the lower portion of a midwestern state. The school houses students in grades kindergarten through fifth, and the total student enrollment is 357. Many of the students come from diverse ethnic homes; Native American, Asian, Black and Hispanic children make up 36% of the school's population. This is a low number compared to many inner-city schools in the district. The expulsion rate is 0.0%, and the attendance rate is 93.9%.

The school's attendance rate, although just slightly below the state's attendance rate of 94.3%, also includes a high rate of student mobility. The chronic truancy rate for the school is 17.4%,as compared to the state's chronic truancy rate of 6.6%.The Chamber of Commerce reported the 1997 population of the city to be an estimated 36,500. Most of the residents of the city are lower to middle-income families.

The school staff consists of 19 teachers, one administrator and two custodians. The school district is divided into quadrants. Each quadrant shares the following support staff: guidance counselor, school nurse, school psychologist, physical education teacher, art teacher, social worker and reading specialist. The average years of teaching experience for the staff is 19, and 68% of those staff members have a Master's degree or above.

School A is committed to teaching its students "Life Skills". The Life Skills that are being practiced are: respect (understanding and respecting others), caring (showing concern for others), patience (waiting your turn without getting upset), problem solving (putting what you know and what you can do into action), effort (being willing to work hard), responsibility (doing what's right), cooperation (working with others) and trustworthiness (being honest and dependable).

School B is located on the south side of a large, midwestern city. The school houses students in Early Childhood (ages three and four) through third grade, and the total school enrollment is 385. The ethnic dispersion of the student population is as follows: 16.6% Black, 5.2% Hispanic, 75.1% Identified White and 24% of various other ethnic minorities. The students in School B have

a 95% attendance rate, as compared with the state's rate of 93.8%. School B has a mobility rate of 15.7%. Its rate of chronic truancy rate is 5.1%, as compared with the state's rate of 2.3%. Fourteen point eight percent of the students in School B come from low income families, and 2.1% of the students have limited English proficiency.

The staff includes a principal, one secretary, 15 classroom teachers, two full-time learning disabilities teachers, one full-time librarian and seven full-time paraprofessionals. There are many itinerant staff members- that is staff members who serve more than one building. Music, art and physical education specialists are itinerant staff members. Other itinerant positions include: social worker, school psychologist, parent liaison, human relations support specialist, implementor, speech and language pathologist and school nurse. Building maintenance staff includes a full-time building engineer and a part-time night custodian.. The average number of years in education for the professional staff is 20, and 86% of these staff members have a Master's degree or above.

School B is partnered with a school that serves students in grades four through six, as well as Early Childhood classes. The schools share a strong Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO); during the past school year, Family Reading Night programs have precede each of the PTO's monthly meetings. Many parents volunteer their time to help in school's office, with classroom projects and special activities and to work with students in small groups or one-on-one. Ninety students currently participate in a weekly after-school program that includes the following options: creative writing, art, music, drama and tutoring in

reading and math. The school has a business partnership with a large nearby aerospace corporation, which has assisted in the purchases of classroom computers with internet connection. The School Improvement Plan includes: improving reading comprehension, improving math and writing scores on the Stanford Achievement Test, maintaining a 95% attendance rate and using positively designed programs to improve student discipline.

School C is located between two larger school districts near the border of two midwestern states. Students in the school are enrolled in pre-kindergarten through second grade classes. The total school enrollment is 296, with an ethnic dispersion of 8.1% Black, 12.8 % Hispanic, 78% identified White and the balance of other ethnic backgrounds. The school's attendance rate is 94.2%, as compared with the state's rate of 93.8%. The student mobility rate is 38.2%. Its chronic truancy rate is 2.6%, which is just above the state's rate of 2.3%. School C's average class size is 23 students. Students from low-income households represent 47.8% of the school's population.

An administrative and office staff includes a principal and a secretary. The faculty includes 20 general education teachers; these teachers have an average of 11 years teaching experience with 30% having a Master's Degree. Art, music and PE teachers are shared with the upper elementary school. Support staff includes a librarian, one full-time and one half-time inclusion facilitators, eight para-educators and two reading specialists. The speech and language pathologist and the nurse are both shared throughout the district. An area

special education co-op collectively hires a part-time social worker and a school psychologist.

School C has a curriculum that is made up of language arts, math, science and social studies. These subjects are taught in self-contained classrooms. Also included in the curriculum are music, art and physical education, which are taught in their respective areas of the building. An English Second Language (ESL) program is available for the 7.1% of the student population with limited English proficiency. First and second grade special education students are fully included in the regular classrooms. The school has a PTO that has monthly meetings and organizes fund-raisers for field trips and to purchase items for the school and the students. The Families and Students Together (FAST) program is also available to help families with parenting skills and family involvement. Organized extra-curricular activities include Daisies, Brownies and Cub Scouts. The local Salvation Army sponsors a basketball league that meets once a week.

School D is located in the same area as School C and is part of the same district. This school serves students in grades three through six. The school's total enrollment is 266 with its ethnic make-up being: 3 % Black, 3.4 % Hispanic, 1.1 % Asian/Pacific Islander and 92% identified White. The attendance rate for School D is 95.7%, which is above that of the state at 93.8%. The student mobility rate is 17%. The rate of chronic truancy is 1%, below the state's rate of 2.3%. Students from low-income households represent 45.1% of the school's population, with this same population participating in a free breakfast/lunch

program. A smaller portion (1.5%) of the school's population is limited English proficient.

School D's staff includes 22 teachers with an average of 11.6 years teaching experience. Twenty-seven percent of these teachers have Master's Degrees. School D's office staff includes a principal and one secretary. The remaining faculty includes four special education teachers, two fine arts teachers, a PE specialist and a part-time ESL teacher. Support staff includes three para-educators, a librarian, and a gifted/ESL coordinator. The nurse, art teacher, music teacher, gifted/ESL coordinator and speech and language pathologist are shared among schools in the district. An area special education co-op collectively hires a part-time social worker and a school psychologist.

The curriculum in School D includes English, reading, spelling, math, science, social studies, art, music and physical education. The school is semi-departmentalized in that the students change classes for math, science and social studies; this program was implemented during the 1997-98 school year. Special education students are fully included.

All students, with the intention that homework will be turned in more often, are using assignment notebooks. Each notebook includes a calendar and a list of school policies for student and parent reference. The school has an incentive program intended to increase attendance and the completion of homework assignments; rewards are given monthly. School D has a parent advisory committee that meets once a month to discuss school issues and to gain insight.

The Surrounding Community

School District A is committed to the concept expressed in the African proverb: "It takes the entire village to educate the child." The district serves more than 7,000 students from pre-kindergarten through high school. The district's range of programs serve a diverse population, giving students the skills and values needed to support lifelong learning, productivity and democratic citizenship. Operating with roughly the same boundaries as the city, the school district operates 12 elementary schools serving pre-kindergarten through grade five, two middle schools serving grades six through eight and one senior high school serving grades nine through twelve. The average teacher salary for District A is $41, 380.50.

Program focus areas within the school district include: opportunities for gifted and talented students, a family literacy program, a wide selection of advance placement course offerings, specialized opportunities to prepare students for technical education, school-age parent and single homemaker programs and Chapter 1 services. There are special education programs at all schools to serve physically and mentally challenged children. All of the elementary programs offer common basic curriculum, with learner outcomes that meet or exceed the state's department of education guidelines.

School District A is committed to student success for the 21st century. This is accomplished through presentation of key data about the district's

strategic goals, students, achievement, personnel and operations. The district's goals are as follows:

#1 - Students will demonstrate high achievements in learning environments where their unique interests and strengths are valued

#2 - Students' educational needs will be addressed through the collective utilization of community and school resources

#3 - Students' learning will be enhanced by the cooperative work of all community members

#4 - Diversity will be valued in a culturally literate learning environment

#5 - Students will demonstrate individual and social responsibility

District enrollment was down slightly for the 1996-97 school year, with the greatest decrease experienced at the elementary and middle school levels. The 7.4% Hispanic portion of the student population continued to grow, as the 28.5% Black and the 62.5% identified White student populations decreased slightly. Approximately one-third of the students qualified as economically disadvantaged, and 17% presented special education needs. The attendance rate of 93.3% remained steady, as did the expulsion rate of 0.04%.[1]

The city in which School A is located is one of the development zones in the state. Tax credits available through the Development Zone program include: jobs tax credit, sales tax credit, location credit ,investment credit and research and development credit. The development of retail services is a priority in the city.

School B is part of a public school district of 27,000 students, with forty elementary schools, four middle schools and four high schools. The average teacher salary for District B is $46,841.00. Included in the district's mission statement is "...equipping all of its diverse students with the tools necessary to compete in a global marketplace, succeed in future educational pursuits and contribute to society". District administration includes a superintendent, two associate superintendents, an assistant superintendent, two directors (including a Director of Desegregation) and an attorney.[2] As a result of a lawsuit in which the district was found guilty of discrimination, a school choice program has been implemented to create individual school populations that are not "racially identifiable".

The population of the surrounding community is over 300,000 and has a per capita income of $14,273. Ethnic ratios for the community are 7.1% Black, 3.4% Hispanic, 90.0% identified White with the balance comprised of other ethnic minorities. Among persons age 25 and older, 36.1% are high school graduates, 18.7% have attended college, and 4.9% have earned a graduate or professional degree.[3]

Schools C and D are in the same district. Included are a primary elementary, an intermediate elementary, a junior high and a high school. Total enrollment for the district is 938. The operating expenditure per student is $5,187.00.

The teaching staff includes 60 teachers with an ethnic dispersion of 98.3%

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[1] School Report Card for District A
[2] School Report Card for District B

identified White and 1.7% people of color. Sixty-eight point one per cent of the teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, and 31.9% have a Master's Degree or above. The average teacher salary is $29,293. 00.

The schools have recently adopted a program, called "First Class". It has two basic goals: 1) students and staff will be more courteous and respectful and 2) students and staff will keep the school neat and clean. In addition, the schools also have a Student Assistance Program, targeting children at risk, in which small group support sessions occur once a week.[4]

Schools C and D are located in an area that is near the border of two midwestern states. This district covers seven square miles are is located between two larger school districts. The area's population is 4,072 with a median age of 33.5. The ethnic background of the area's population is 5.5% Black, 4.9% Hispanic, .5% American Indian, .5% Asian/Pacific Islander and 90.0% identified White.

There are 1,688 households within the district. Of these, 1,092 are family households, with 288 of these families residing in mobile homes. The median home price is $39,500. A large percentage of the area's people rent their homes, with the median monthly rental cost being
$273.00. The area's high school graduation rate was 63.8% as of the 1990 census. Four point eight percent of the area's population has a Bachelor's Degree or above.

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[3] (City B) Area Quick Reference Guide
[4] School Report Card for Districts C & D

The community in which schools C and D are located is a blue-collar working area offering industry, manufacturing, trade and service-type jobs. The majority of workers fall into the categories of machine operators, assemblers or inspectors. The median household income is $26,331 with ten percent of the population falling below the poverty level.[5]

National Context of the Problem

Listening is an integral part of every child's school day, yet it is not a school subject like reading, math or music. It is estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of a student's classroom time is spent listening: to the teacher, to other students or to audio media (Smith, 1992), although they often do it ineffectively (Jalongo, 1991).

According to Rebecca Brent and Patricia Anderson (1991), students lack good listening skills for several reasons. One reason is that teachers neglect to teach students strategies for effective listening. Teachers may think that listening is something natural, a skill that simply will develop given enough time and practice. While 80% of what one knows is acquired through listening, most adults operate at no better than a 25% listening efficiency level, (Hunsaker, 1990), suggesting that practice alone does not lead to skill.

Memory is a key component of the listening process. Brain research has shown that short-term memory is limited to about seven pieces of information (Miller, 1957). Through organization and the realization of patterns, bits of

[5] (City C & D) Census

information can be grouped into larger pieces. Through the memorization process, we must recreate the sight, sound or feeling in our imagination...seeing it again and again in our "mind's eye" (O'Connor, 1989).

Teachers are often frustrated with students' lack of listening skills and expect students to listen when they say "Listen, please". Because listening is the principle medium by which students get information and directions, it is important for teachers to provide the tools for students to become better listeners.

When listening either to spoken words or to music, the ability to hear the words or the music in the inner ear determines to a large part the degree to which the material has been learned. It is generally accepted that anybody who can use their senses in the outside world can use them internally to "re-present" their experience (O'Connor, 1989). Therefore, to create the strongest memories, the learner must have a picture, sound and feeling of the experience. Since patterns are so important in music, a high level of musical skill would require good organization in the brain. Thus, the ability to compose and perform music is integrally related to the ability to listen (Priest, 1996). Successful music students show certain patterns when listening to music; among them is adopting a particular posture...as if they tuned their bodies to the music (O'Connor, 1989).

Though schools spend very little time developing listening skills, we do know that we listen more than we speak, read or write (As cited by Newton, 1990). When students attentively listen, they are better able to function and communicate with others. As a skill, listening involves receiving, attending, organizing, understanding and evaluating messages from the environment.

Instruction in listening is first directed toward supporting students in understanding the role that listening plays in thinking. Instruction begins by creating activities that enable students to discover the importance of focusing their listening. As students become aware of the purpose of their listening, additional activities are included that help them refine their listening strategies.

Listening purposefully for verbal and nonverbal cues helps students of all ages control their impulsivity and, thus, increase their chances of determining the relevance of the message being received.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document possible causes of inadequate listening skills of the students, parent and student surveys were developed and administered in early September, 1998 (Appendices A& B). Both student and parent surveys included questions concerning family interaction (i.e. family book sharing, family dinners and number of siblings), amount of television viewing time and their general idea of listening.

Student survey questions regarding family interaction gave students an opportunity to reflect on how often they communicate with their parents. The following table represents data collected on questions relating to family interaction.

In review of the literature we found that television viewing time was a factor in poor listening habits. It reduced the amount of time spent interacting with others. The graph on page 20 represents the results of the survey questions regarding student television viewing.

Table 1

Parent/ Student Communication

	Home/School Connection: Question #3[1]		TV and Dinner: Question #6[2]	
	Student	Parent	Student	Parent
Site A	84%	100%	22%	38%
Site B	90%	100%	28%	57%
Site C	95%	100%	46%	50%
Site D	100%	100%	48%	43%

To conclude the survey we asked students and parents for descriptions of good listeners. Definitions from students range from basic responses such as, " I don't know", "A good boy/girl" and "I sit", to more descriptive phrases including, "Someone that looks at you when you're talking and understands what you are saying", " A good listener is a person that looks at the person that's talking", and " "Listen to your teacher and mom and she doesn't have to say it more than once". Definitions that parents submitted included: " When I say something, I mean do it", " Paying attention, comprehending, able to do", Not talking when someone

[1] Survey question #3 refers to interaction about school among family members. The percentage shown indicates the number of positive responses to the question.

[2] Survey question #6 refers to whether or not the TV is on during dinner. The percentage shown indicates the number of negative responses to the question.

else is talking- look at the person speaking and interact with information that pertains to the subject" and "Waiting to hear what others have to say and being quiet while they are talking". Parent responses were found to be more involved although not necessarily demonstrating more depth of understanding.

Further evidence of the problem was found through teacher observation and the use of observation checklists over a three-week period. (Appendix C&D) Behaviors observed included: listening to the speaker, asking clarifying questions and performing assigned tasks. These behaviors were recorded as either achieving expectation or not achieving expectation. The first component of the checklist was "listen to the speaker." If a student was observed as not listening to the speaker, they were observed displaying off task behavior. The researchers defined off task behavior as talking to others, "playing" with objects not related to the lesson or allowing themselves to be distracted by surrounding stimuli. The second component was "ask clarifying questions." Clarifying questions were defined by the researchers as questions that are directly related to the lesson. The third component was "perform assigned tasks." This observation was recorded after an assignment was given that was related to the lesson. Additional space was provided for comments regarding each student.

Reflective learning logs were also used during this time period. A reflective learning log gave students an opportunity to write about, talk about or illustrate what they have learned, depending on their individual learning abilities. (Appendix E)

This was used to check for listening and comprehension of a lesson as well as providing students with a chance to express their thoughts or questions regarding the lesson.

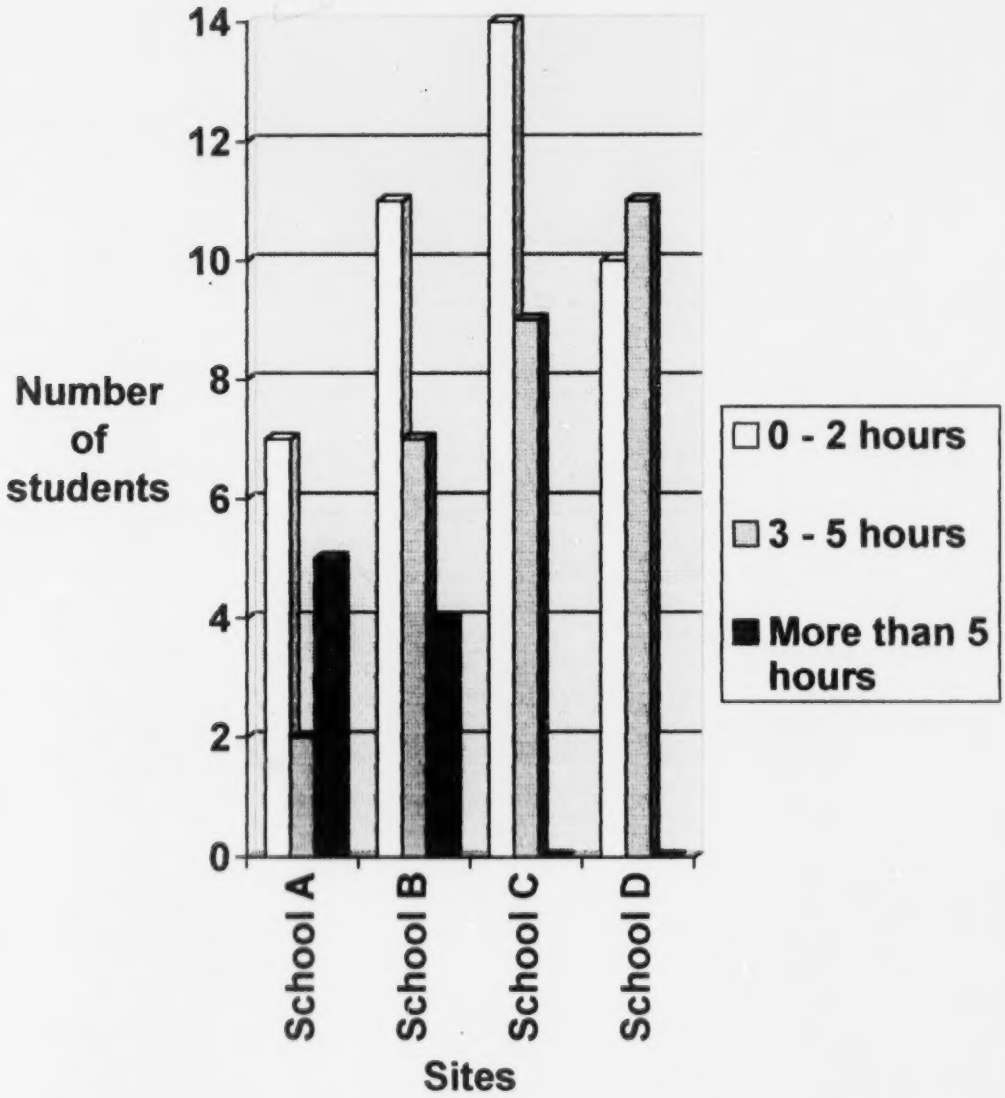

Figure 1. The average amount of time students spent watching television each week at the targeted elementary schools as indicated by survey results. (Question #7: How often do you watch TV? / How much time does your child spend in front of the TV.)

Probable Causes

Based on data collected from parent and student surveys, as well as current literature on listening skills, four probable causes have been indicated. These causes are the effects of television, poor listening habits, external distractions and lack of instruction in listening skills.

EFFECTS OF TELEVISION

The first probable cause was amount of television viewing. Ward's study indicated, as cited in Palmer (1997), that children lack the ability to listen selectively. When the television is on frequently, family members don't verbally communicate. Children often lack those daily routines with conversation, such as telling bedtime stories, getting dressed and learning nursery rhymes, because they're entertained by the television. "Discrimination of significant sounds is a vital factor in the development of phonological awareness - the ability to tune into speech and recognize the individual sounds in spoken words. And without phonological awareness, children may make little sense of phonics - teaching will fall on what are...deaf ears." "They learn not to attend to language as a major source of meaning." (Ward, 1997).

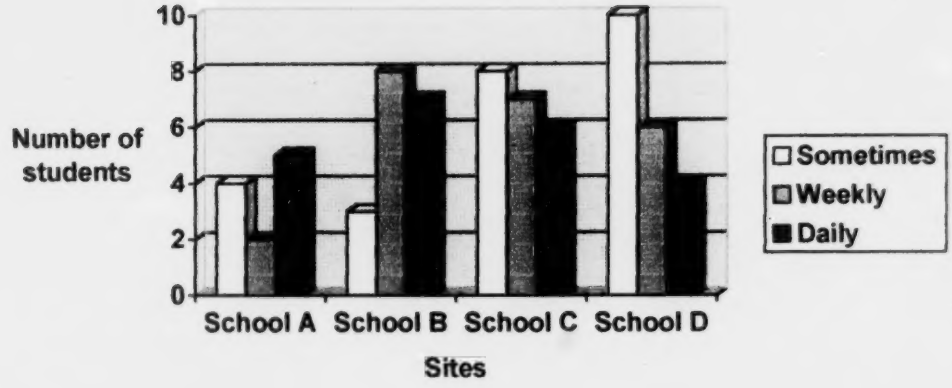

Figure 2. Average amounts of parent/child book sharing, as shown by student and parent survey results. (Questions #8 & #9: Do you read to your child? / Does your child share books with you?)

LACK OF INSTRUCTION

Teachers understand the importance of teaching language skills, however, they often neglect to teach strategies for effective listening. (Brent and Anderson, 1993). Generally, children spend more of their time listening than any other activity in the classroom. However, listening is seldom a part of the curriculum. Most classroom instruction is presented in lecture form, yet students are taught listening skills less than 10% of the time. (Newton, 1990) As Wanner points out, (Jalongo, 1995) much of the listening a teacher expects a student to do is to follow directions and gather facts; " The ability to listen critically is far down the American public school's practical list of priorities." (p. 14). An article by Mary Renck Jalongo, (1995) indicates that teachers lack the training necessary to develop children's listening skills.

POOR LISTENING HABITS

Another probable cause for inadequate listening skills is the acquisition of bad listening habits. According to a Middle Tennessee State University website, http://www.mtsu.edu/~studskl/hslisten.html, "In Order to Take Good Notes You Must Be a Good Listener", bad habits can be formed by numerous causes. Among these causes are: a boring speaker, a poor presentation, lengthy large group discussions, environmental distractions and never being taught proper listening skills from the beginning. These bad habits include: talking instead of listening, thinking of what you're going to say instead of listening, fidgeting with objects and daydreaming. As a veteran teacher states, "The ears can't listen when the lips are a-flappin'!"

EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

External distractions can also inhibit students' listening comprehension and retention skills. In a normal classroom of twenty to thirty students, distractions such as paper noises, shuffling feet, etc. are not preventable. An undesirable learning environment that includes poor lighting, uncomfortable room temperatures, traditional seating arrangements, and lack of windows also contribute to this problem. Because of these distractions, teachers must modify the learning environment (McShane and Jones, 1990).

Some general suggestions for modifying the learning environment include: gaining the full attention of the students before speaking, speaking with a quiet voice - children attend better if they must listen more closely, introduce

information in small steps and provide praise and positive reinforcement when they do listen and follow through with instruction.

Chapter three is a literature review that provides suggested solutions and activities to improve listening skills in children. The suggested solutions include: direct instruction in listening, modeling, parent and home suggestions.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

After reviewing the literature, it was found that the poor listening skills of students could be attributed to several factors. First, students need adults to be models of good listening (Jalongo, 1995). A second factor affecting the development of good listening skills is the lack of direct instruction of these skills in the classroom. Experiences that may improve listening skills can be implemented in daily activities (Brent & Anderson, 1993). Lastly, parents can provide meaningful interaction to help improve the listening skills of their children at home (Palmer, 1997).

SOLUTIONS

It is necessary to provide activities that encourage and strengthen good listening habits. The feedback that we received from parent and student surveys and teacher observation, as supported by the current literature, points to the following solutions: Modeling, teacher instruction and home connection. The solutions are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

MODELING

"Adults can teach children to listen first and foremost by being good listeners themselves."(Jalongo, 1995, p.14)"Listening to our students is an essential skill for teachers to have, because, when we listen, the kids feel valued. As the expression goes, "Kids don't care how much we know until they know how much we care." As stated in the article by Brent and Anderson (1993), every teacher should model attentive listening behavior as part of their natural interaction with children. Suggestions for modeling good listening skills, as cited in http://www.rusd.k12.ca.us/parents/listening.html, are:

1. Pay attention and show interest
2. Encourage conversation
3. Listen patiently
4. Hear people out
5. Be aware of body language.

Teachers need to remember that their students are not the only ones who need to listen, and that students need opportunities to be speakers, as well. Students need to be given examples of good listening by the adults around them – especially parents and teachers. By these examples, students can be shown how important it is to listen to each other. Another important point to remember is that good listeners are *active*. "They get involved with what they hear, both intellectually and emotionally". (Jacobs, 1990). "Such listeners give complete attention to what they hear, actively process the information, make pertinent comments and ask relevant questions. " (Brent & Anderson, 1993)

TEACHER INSTRUCTION

Listening is a critical component of thinking and language comprehension. It is the most used channel for learning because it receives and forwards so many messages to the brain.

As research has shown, teachers are lacking the training necessary to effectively teach listening skills to their students. In review of the literature, there are general suggestions teachers can implement to improve listening skills.

Our instruction in listening is first directed toward supporting students in understanding the role that listening plays in thinking. We begin our instruction by creating activities that enable students to discover the importance of focusing

their listening. As students become aware of the purpose of their listening, we include additional activities that help them refine their listening strategies.

Listening purposefully for verbal and nonverbal cues helps students of all ages control their impulsivity and, thus, increase their chances of determining the relevance of the message being received. This is according to an article from a Middle Tennessee State University website article, http //ww mtsu edu/~studskl/hslisten.html, "In Order to Take Good Notes You Must Be a Good Listener."

Focused lessons about specific skills can make students better listeners (Jalongo, 1991). Children can be taught to predict what they might hear, to follow directions, to appreciate language, to identify main ideas and supporting details, to draw justifiable inferences, to differentiate fact from fiction and to analyze critically. These skills are essential in enabling students to become more effective listeners.

Although many teachers assume that being a good listener simply means looking at the speaker and sitting quietly, these are not necessary behaviors for good listening. Good listeners are those who make appropriate responses to what they hear. They actively process information, make pertinent comments and ask relevant questions.

The keys to meaningful listening instruction are:

Identify the needed skill or strategy- as students are observed throughout the day the teacher seeks to raise their awareness of good listeners by asking them to recall ways people show that they are listening.

Teach the lesson- minilessons that are integrated into activities or entire lessons on listening are ways to emphasize listening strategies and their importance in communication and learning.

Supervise practice and debriefing- the teacher engages the students in discussions that help remind them of the strategies they are to use and when to apply them.

Review skills and strategies previously taught- the teacher reviews strategies that students have already learned, sometimes before the strategies will be needed for instruction.

And select specific situations- the ultimate goal for a teacher is that students adjust their listening strategies automatically to each classroom experience, independent of any suggestions. (Jalongo, 1991).

A teacher who wishes to help students become better listeners should provide experiences with a wide variety of listening situations, as cited by Brent & Anderson (1993). Following are possible settings for the practice of effective listening:

Author's chair- a special chair that a student sits in to read an original piece of literature. This chair is usually decorated and showcased in a special place in the classroom.

Reading aloud- students need opportunities to " celebrate" their reading comprehension. Read alouds, ideally should occur daily. Reading aloud can be done many ways: whole group, partner reading and an individual student can read to the class.

Writing workshops- a writer's workshop requires peer review to tie into listening and involves: 1) the student writing a rough draft, 2) having a conference with the teacher for editing, 3) rewriting the story with corrections, 4) proof reading the story with a student partner, 5) sharing/reading the story to the class, 6) asking questions of classmates to check for listening.

Cooperative groups- in cooperative group learning, students work as a team in groups of four or five. Each cooperative group team member is assigned a role, for example; materials manager, time keeper, recorder or reporter. Students work together as a team to complete a task. In cooperative group learning, students are reminded that there is no "I" in team.

Reading theatre- in readers' theatre students are given opportunities to read from plays or story books. Students read their parts as if they were the character from the story.

Lastly, retelling- student comprehension and listening skills can be observed by having a student retell a story. Story retells can be done many ways, for example: through the use of graphic organized, story sequencing and round robin. A graphic organizer is a visual tool for organizing information and thoughts. Story sequencing involves retelling the events in the story; what happened first, next and last. Students enjoy playing charades as a way of sequencing the story. In a round robin, students sit in a circle and each student tells one part of the story from beginning to end.

HOME CONNECTION

School is not the only place that children can work on improving listening skills. The home is also an important place to work on these skills. A few strategies are listed under the area of modeling. A study by Ward (as cited in Palmer, 1997) states that when parents turned off the television for 20 minutes a day and were involved in with their children in meaningful interaction (such as nursery rhymes and routine language play), the listening skills of the children were greatly improved. Palmer (1997) also states that "when parents were shown ways of interacting with their child, including baby-talk, nursery rhymes and routine language play, their children made rapid improvements and were soon back on track with their listening skills."

Other suggestions for parents include: ask and encourage questions, discuss feelings, share thoughts and give praise. Parents are important in building children's communication skills because most "children have a deeper involvement with their parents than with any other adult, and the family as a unit has lifelong contact with its members." (Carl Smith, 1992). The parent is the child's first teacher.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of the use of specific strategies to improve listening skills during the period of September 1998 to December 1998, the targeted elementary students will increase their comprehension and retention of concepts taught, as measured by student reflection logs, teacher observation, and teacher checklists.

In order to accomplish the project objective, which is to improve listening, the following processes are necessary:

1. Implement and model listening skill strategies in daily instruction.
2. Implement reflective learning logs to assess student listening skills, comprehension, and retention of concepts presented.

Project Action Plan

The action plan for the targeted first and third grade students will start the second week of school which is the week of August 31, 1998 for all sites. The plan will run for 16 weeks ending on December 18, 1998. Included in the plan are interventions such as direct teacher instruction, researcher modeling and practice, and home suggestion such as interaction through singing songs or reading books.

During the second week of school the principal and staff will be informed of the project. Also letters informing parents were attached to surveys, that will be sent home with students. Student surveys will be administered in class during weeks two and three.

Teacher observation and checklists will be kept beginning week two and continued throughout the project. Learning logs will be introduced at this time. A learning log is used to assess comprehension of a lesson and listening as well as a place to express feelings about lessons and to ask questions and to share thoughts. Teacher observation, checklists and learning logs will continue to be used during weeks three and four.

To improve listening skills a few selected interventions will be implemented. The interventions include direct instruction by the teacher, researcher modeling and practice and offering parents home suggestions. Direct instruction is when the teacher provides minilessons or entire lessons on listening skills. Researcher modeling consists of the researcher demonstrating good

listening habits throughout the day. Examples of parent suggestions to use at home are reading/sharing literature, singing songs, and less TV. time.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, student reflection logs, teacher observation and teacher checklists will be utilized.

Chapter four provides results of the actions taken to improve listening skills in children in sites A, B, C, and D.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Project

The objective of this project was to improve the listening skills of elementary students in grades one, two and three in two neighboring midwestern states. The implementation of three categories of interventions: direct listening instruction by the teacher, researcher modeling and practice, and home suggestions were utilized to affect the desired changes.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION BY THE TEACHER

Direct instruction was used by the teachers at sites A, B, C and D to teach and improve the children's listening skills. The direct instruction began the first week of school, rather than the fifth week as stated in the action plan. This change was made to establish expectations early in the year. The skills that were taught included: attentive behavior, wait time, showing respect, tuning out distractions, responding appropriately with relevant questions and answers, and recognizing the importance of listening. The skills were taught in cooperative groups and whole class settings.

Attentive behavior was established through visual signals. Attentive behavior is described by the researchers as focusing on the speaker and sitting quietly. A listening signal was established at each site; all sites used a raised hand, which was consistent with the cooperative learning signal. Students were expected to stop talking and look at the speaker when they saw the signal.

Students were also encouraged to use the signal to remind others of what they needed to do. At sites C and D, a second hand signal was used that involved counting to three – one finger meaning one, two fingers meaning two and three fingers meaning three. This signaled students to get ready to listen.

Wait time was addressed to give students adequate opportunities for processing information. This is a strategy used by the students and described by the researchers as a time for thinking about questions, formulating answers and waiting their turn to share their thoughts. Wait time forced impulsive students to listen to others before shouting out answers. One strategy used by the researchers was "think, pair, share" in which students worked with a partner to process their thoughts, discuss their answers and, then, share their ideas with the entire class. Another strategy used was the counting to three, either with a hand sign or verbally with a hand sign. This was used at sites A and B to cue the students to wait for all directions before moving.

The showing of respect is reinforced during wait time. Interruptions and outbursts were addressed by the researchers as being inappropriate and disrespectful to the whole classroom community. At site B, where the setting was a music class, showing respect was addressed by the researcher, not only when a guest performer was present, but also when the students performed for each other.

Tuning out distractions was another factor addressed through direct instruction. The tuning out of distractions is defined by the researchers as not allowing anything to get in the way of attending and listening to the speaker.

The researchers used techniques such as including a student's name in the directions or giving verbal praise to those who were attending to the lesson. At all sites, students were also asked to repeat what they heard, as a check for listening. Researchers at all sites observed that, as students tuned out distractions, their time on task increased.

Students were also instructed to respond appropriately with relevant questions and answers. At sites A and B, the "KWL" (Appendix F) graphic organizer was used to guide students' thoughts and questions and to help them listen purposefully when a guest speaker visited their classroom. The "KWL" is an acronym for "know, want to know and learned". It is usually done as a three-section chart with the students filling in the first two sections, "know" and "want to know", prior to the lesson. The third section, what was "learned", is completed at the conclusion of the lesson to assess the students' learning. At site C, using appropriate questions and answers was integrated into language arts lessons. The relevance of questions and answers to lessons was also emphasized during class discussions at all sites.

Recognizing the importance of listening was the last skill directly taught. At sites A, B, C and D, "Mind Map" (Appendix G) graphic organizers were completed by students working in cooperative groups. The "Mind Map" is a type of graphic organizer that allows students to visually organize their thoughts and ideas. This "Mind Map" posed the question, "Why is listening important?" The students' task was to answer the question and, then, share their answers with the rest of the class in "round robin" fashion, in which each group shared an answer

from their "map". Listening was important in this activity so that answers weren't repeated.

MODELING

Once students were directly taught, listening skills were reinforced through modeling by the researchers. Modeling techniques included the use of listening strategies that were previously taught such as attentive behavior and showing respect to the speaker/performer. Signals for attentive behavior and wait time were also modeled; these were the hand signals mentioned previously in the section on direct instruction. Another modeling technique utilized by the researchers was verbal recognition. Verbal recognitions were given to those students who displayed attentive behavior in order to engage others in similar behavior. Some examples were: "I like the way 'Johnny' is sitting quietly and ready to listen, "Thank-you, 'Maria', for showing us the quiet signal" and "I appreciate the way you have your materials ready. Can you find someone else who is ready?" Students and teachers at all sites were given opportunities to recognize others and reward them with verbal praise.

HOME CONNECTION

The researchers realized the importance of the home/school bond to reinforce skills learned at school. As stated in the Action Plan, researchers at all sites sent home letters informing parents of this project. In the second week, parent surveys regarding listening were distributed. At sites A and C, books

were sent home with comprehension questions (Appendix H). Also at site A, copies of attentive listening behaviors (Appendix I) and directions for listening games were sent home (Appendix J). The researcher at site B sent home instructions on and suggestions for playing a musical instrument known as a recorder, as well as music to practice on the recorder. At site B, the targeted population participated in a music program, which was presented to parents during an evening performance. Researchers at sites A, B and C contributed classroom happenings to their school newsletters.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In review of the student reflective learning logs, observation checklists and reflecting on teacher observations, the researchers analyzed the information to see if there was an improvement in the children's listening skills.

STUDENT REFLECTIVE LEARNING LOGS

Reflective learning logs were used at sites A, B, C, and D to check for comprehension and listening upon completion of a lesson. The learning logs were implemented in different ways at each site to meet the needs of the targeted population. The following paragraphs will describe the use and results at each site.

The targeted population at site A consisted of regular and special needs students in the second grade. When reflective learning logs were first implemented students responded by drawing pictures. They were asked to illustrate what they learned from a lesson in a whole language unit. As the year

progressed, students were able to use phonetic spelling to complete their thoughts along with the pictures on their learning logs. For example: during the unit on Dental Health, a dentist came to visit. The students were asked to write the dentist a thank you note. In the note the students explained and illustrated what they had learned from the dental presentation. By the end of the intervention, students became familiar with reflective learning logs and were able to express their thoughts through writing complete sentences and in most cases omitting pictures. As students' writing improved, so did their listening, as indicated by complete thought responses to questions asked on the reflective learning log.

The targeted population at site B consisted of a music class of third grade students. An inclusion special needs child joined the class about halfway through the intervention. The reflection lesson logs used at site B asked students to complete three open ended phrases: Today I learned..., I liked..., and Questions or thought I have are... . Student reflective lesson logs were used early in the year and several times throughout the following months. When the logs were used initially, all students but one completed the first statement with the name of the song. In the "I liked..." section of the logs, more than half of the students wrote about the activity in which they participated during the music class. Students were directed to write about anything related to music as they completed the third statement. When the logs were used during subsequent lessons, more students completed the first statement with words or phrases related to the objective(s) of the music lesson, although some students continued

to write only about the name of the song or activity. Using this reflective lesson log not only helped the students to think about what they had learned, but also reminded the researcher to state the lesson objective(s) at the beginning of the lesson and to restate the objective(s) at the close of the lesson. Since music classes were only thirty minutes long, the lesson logs were always used during the class period (a day or sometimes a week later) following the lesson. Therefore, students had to retain the information for up to a week. When students were asked for a verbal response at the close of the lesson, more students were able to identify the objective of the music lesson than when the lesson logs were used. There was always at least one fourth of the students who completed the phrase, "Today I learned..." with only a reference to the name of the song or activity. Due to time constraints, the logs were not used as frequently as the researcher would have preferred to be able to show significant improvement in student comprehension and listening.

The targeted population for site C consisted of regular and special needs students in the first grade. When reflective learning logs were first introduced, the students demonstrated their knowledge and listening of a lesson by drawing pictures to explain their responses. An example of this, during an apple unit, was when the students responded to the question, "What are three ways to use apples?" The students drew three pictures of how apples are used. As the year progressed, students responded verbally to questions on a lesson while the teacher and/or paraeducator wrote down their responses. The students would copy the words on paper and illustrate their answer. As students' phonetic

writing skills improved, they were asked to write their responses on their own and illustrate their response. At the end of the intervention, students showed improvements in writing and listening as indicated by the responses of the reflective learning logs.

The targeted population of site D consisted of third grade students. Reflective learning logs asked students to complete three open ended phrases. The phrases included: Today I learned..., I liked..., Questions or thoughts I have are... . Student reflective learning logs were used occasionally to assess listening and comprehension. Students were required to write their responses to the first two items on the reflection log, but the third item was optional. The teacher observed that the students who answered the third item were more accurate in their responses, which showed better listening, than those students who chose not answer the third item. At the end of the intervention, a majority of the students showed an improvement in listening and comprehension, as indicated by the responses on the reflective learning logs.

Observation Checklists and Teacher Observation

Observation checklists were used to document attentive listening behaviors at sites A, B, C and D. Attentive listening behaviors included: listens to speaker, asks clarifying questions, and performs assigned task.

Use of the checklist itself seemed to improve the attentive listening behaviors of the students – that is, when a checklist was brought out by the researcher, the students, being aware of what the researcher was looking for, were more apt to demonstrate those behaviors. However, when students were

unaware that a checklist was being used, they fell back into poor listening habits. This trend was observed when the observation checklists were implemented in September at all sites. Site C was the exception, in that, the students were unaware that a checklist was being used at all because the class paraeducator scored them. The researchers also observed, at all sites, that through consistent teacher modeling and use of the attentive listening signal, most students began to model and use the listening signal to help remind others to listen.

The researcher at site A noted, through observation checklists, that attentive listening behaviors improved with the implementation of the following listening strategies: attentive listening signals, active listening posture and verbal appreciations. Observation checklists were used during direct instruction of various lessons to assess students listening and time on task.

At site B, although attentive listening behaviors improved for most students, as a result of direct instruction in the area of listening, observations recorded showed that one or two students consistently failed to demonstrate appropriate listening behaviors. An exception to this would occur when the researcher would follow the observation period by reading back the names of students who were on task. Occasionally the researcher would tell the students beforehand that the names of those who listened appropriately and/or stayed on task would be read following the activity, letting the entire class know how everyone did during the observation period. This drew the researcher to make several conclusions. Peer pressure provided strong motivation for the students.

Students knew what was expected of them, that is, what the researcher was looking for. Although a student who had not performed the desired task one time might respond to the reading of names by the researcher by acting like they thought it was "cool" that they didn't do well, they usually did much better the next time the researcher used a checklist.

The researcher at site C observed that attentive listening behaviors improved for the majority of the targeted students as a result of direct instruction in listening. The skills taught were mentioned previously in chapter four. Even though majority of the students showed an improvement in their listening skills, some of the students still needed reminders.

Most of the students at site D demonstrated the desired listening behaviors when reminded to use them during the administration of the observation checklist. However, without the reminders, many of those students failed to demonstrate appropriate listening habits. About one fourth of the students at site D failed to demonstrate good listening a majority of the time regardless of implementation efforts.

After analyzing the results of the action research, the researchers have drawn conclusions and offer recommendations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers concluded that through direct instruction in listening, modeling, parent and home connection, the students showed an increase in listening skills, therefore improving comprehension.

Direct instruction in listening had the greatest impact on the students' improvement in listening. This improvement was evident through the review of observation checklists and daily teacher observation.

Modeling proved to be a good reminder to students to use appropriate listening habits. Modeling was especially useful when students were given verbal appreciations and praise.

Home connections were valuable, but inconsistently followed through by parents for various reasons, such as, students not taking papers home, parents not checking for papers when the child came home, parent illiteracy and lack of parental concern.

Although the implementations were successful, the researchers feel that there are some modifications that could be made to help improve listening skills in children. A recommendation for future researchers would be to write parallel questions on the student and parent surveys – that is, to have the same response choices (i.e. "yes, no", "sometimes, weekly, daily", etc.). A second recommendation for future researchers on this topic would be to have a person other than the researcher administer an observation checklist on at least one occasion. This would eliminate any bias shown by the teacher/researcher resulting from expectations, distractions or what had happened during previous checklist observations. One modification the researchers suggest is to make direct instruction in listening part of the school's curriculum beginning in kindergarten. Each grade level should incorporate listening skills into their daily instruction. Another modification is to have a consistent school wide listening

signal. An example of this would be two fingers held like a peace sign in the air. This would increase the awareness of the importance of listening among the student population. Awareness is the beginning of progress that will lead to better listening.

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PARENT SURVEY

1. My child is a ___boy ___girl.

2. How many children live in your home?
   ___1 ___2-3 ___More than 3

3. Do you talk about school with your child?
   ___Yes ___No

4. Do you eat dinner as a family?
   ___Yes ___No
   How often?
   ___Once a week ___2-3 Times a week ___daily

5. When you eat dinner as a family, do you talk to each other?
   ___Yes ___No

6. Is the TV on during dinner?
   ___Yes ___No

7. How much time does your child spend in front of the TV each day?
   ___0-2 Hours ___3-5 Hours ___More than 5 hours

8. Do you read to your child?
   ___Seldom ___Once a week ___Daily

9. Does your child "share" (talk about the pictures, retell the story, read) books to you?
   ___Seldom ___Once a week ___Daily

10. Do you often have to repeat yourself when you give your child directions?
    ___Yes ___No

11. Does your child look at you when you are speaking to him/her?
    ___Yes ___No

12. Do you feel that your child has good listening skills?
    ___Yes ___No

13. What does listening mean to you?

STUDENT SURVEY

Please complete the survey.

1. Are you a boy or a girl?_____

2. How many brothers and sisters do you have?_____

3. Do you talk to your parents about school?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

4. Do you eat dinner with your family?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

5. Do you talk during dinner?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

6. Is the TV on during dinner?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

7. How often do you watch TV?
___0-2 hours a day ___3-5 hours a day ___more than five hours a day

8. Does someone at home read to you?
___yes ___no

8a. How often?
___not very much ___a couple times a week ___everyday

9. Do you read books with someone at home?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

10. Do your parents have to tell you directions more than once?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

11. Do you look at your parents when they talk to you?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

12. Do you think you are a good listener?
___yes ___no ___sometimes

13. What do you think a good listener is? (Write your answer below or on the back)

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR LISTENING

Week of:	Listens to speaker	Asks clarifying questions	Performs assigned task	Comments
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				
16.				
17.				
18.				
19.				

KEY: + = Achieving expectation o = Not achieving expectation

MUSIC CLASS OBSERVATION LIST

TEACHER: Dates: _____ Class: _____

_____

Students' names	Stayed on task	Participated in class activities	Handled materials correctly	Listened to and followed directions	Additional comments
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5:					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13					
14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					
18.					
19.					
20.					
21.					
22.					
23.					
24.					
25.					
26.					
27.					
28.					
29.					
30.					
31.					
32.					

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NAME_____ DATE_____

REFLECTIVE LESSON LOG

Today I learned...

I liked...

Questions or thoughts I have are...

THE KWL

Topic: _____

Know	**W**ant to know	**L**earned

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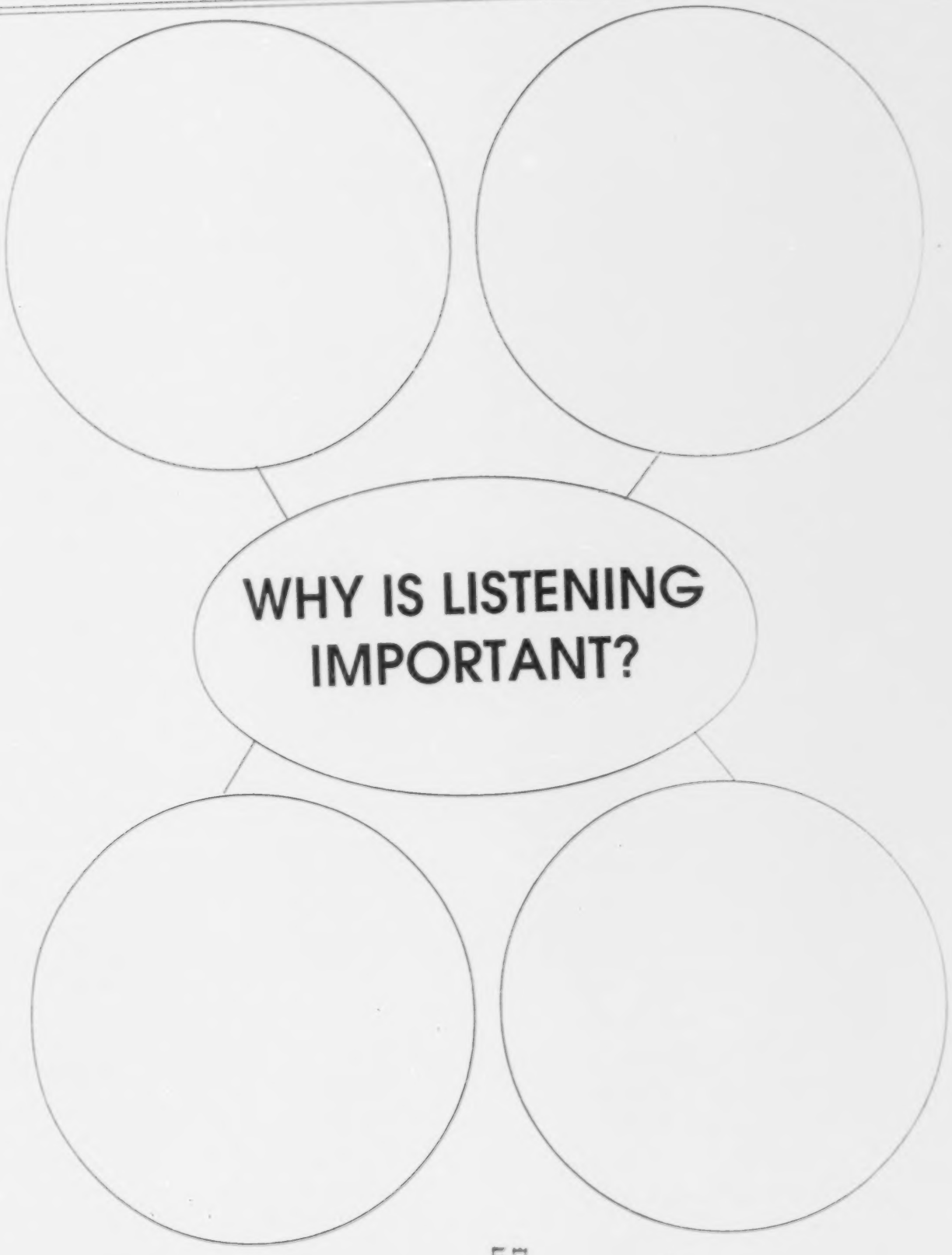

WHY IS LISTENING IMPORTANT?

Listening Comprehension

After reading a story with your child. Ask him/her these questions:

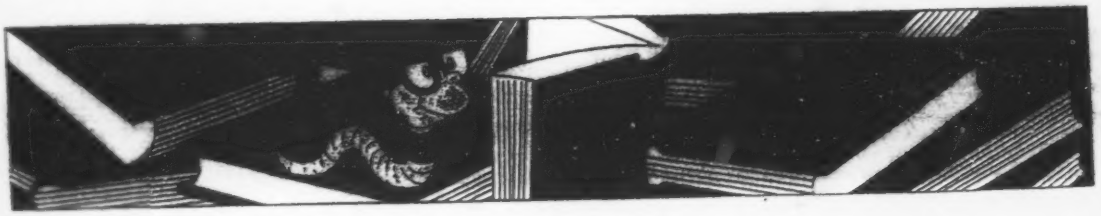
Who was/were the main character(s)?

Where did the story take place?

What type of story (genre) was it? (Fiction, Biography, Fantasy, etc.)?

What did you like best about the story?

What did you like the least about the story?



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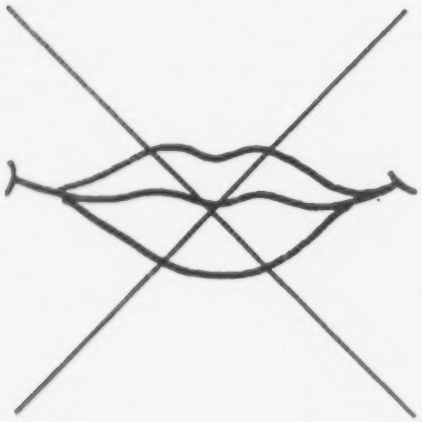
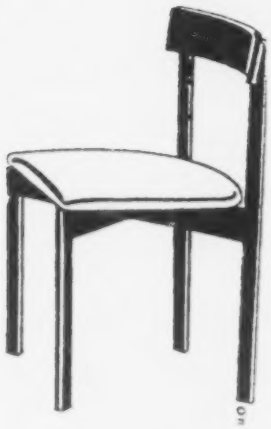
Active Listening Posture

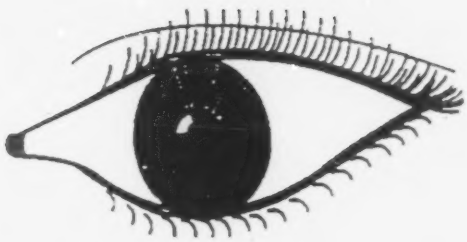


NO TALKING



SIT UP

HANDS ON LAP



LOOK AT THE SPEAKER

Name_____

Homework

Play the Cookie jar game with someone at home.

Cookie Jar game directions.

1. Sit in a circle.
2. Assign each person a number, an animal name. or use their own name.
3. The game starts by someone saying "Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar? Number 2 stole the cookie from the cookie jar." That person responds by saying "Who me?, couldn't be, Number 5 stole the cookie from the cookie jar."

Each person goes around calling out random numbers and that person needs to "listen closely" because if he/she misses their cue, they have to sit out.

4. As you play this game, the children clap their hands in rhythm. Slap hands on lap. Clap. Snap fingers on one hand. Snap fingers on the other hand. Keep repeating this rhythm.